



(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:
28.05.2003 Bulletin 2003/22

(51) Int Cl.7: **C22C 29/08, C23C 30/00**

(21) Application number: **02026177.2**

(22) Date of filing: **25.11.2002**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR
IE IT LI LU MC NL PT SE SK TR
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(72) Inventors:
• **Qvick, Jan**
730 61 Vlrso (SE)
• **Zackrisson, Jenni**
737 47 Fagersta (SE)

(30) Priority: **27.11.2001 SE 0103970**

(74) Representative: **Taquist, Lennart**
SECO TOOLS AB
732 82 FAGERSTA (SE)

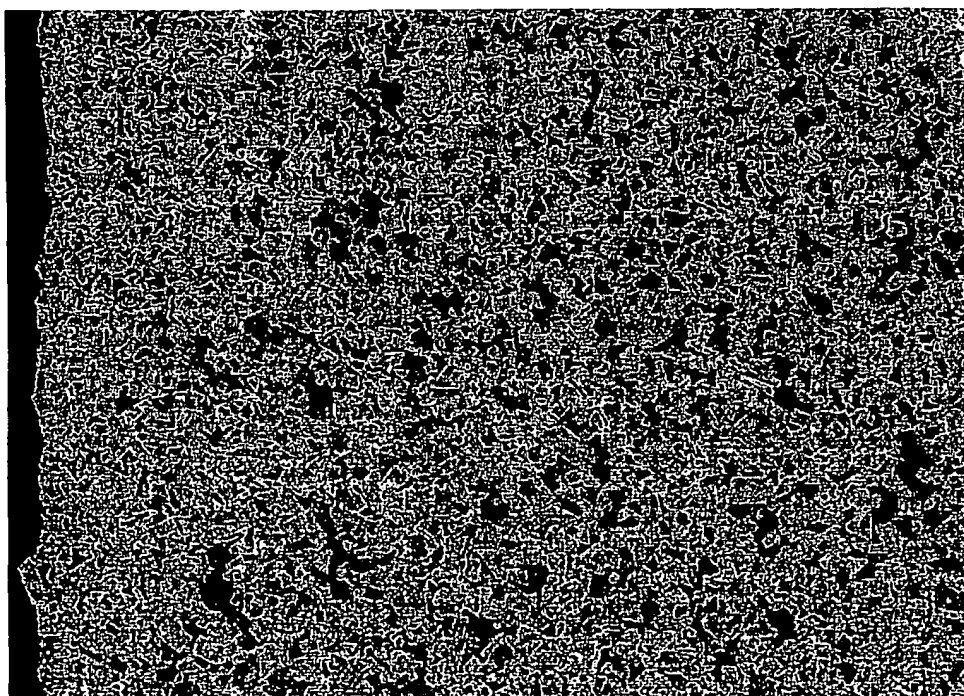
(71) Applicant: **SECO TOOLS AB**
732 82 Fagersta (SE)

(54) **Cemented carbide with binder phase enriched surface zone**

(57) The present invention relates to a cutting tool insert consisting of a cemented carbide substrate and a coating. The cemented carbide substrate comprises 73-93% by weight WC, 4-12% by weight binder phase, and cubic carbide phase with a binder phase enriched

surface zone essentially free of cubic carbide phase. The cubic carbide phase comprises of elements from the groups IVb and Vb, with the tantalum content on a level corresponding to a technical impurity. Inserts according to the invention exhibit favourable edge strength and thermal shock resistance.

Figure 1.



Description

[0001] The present invention relates to coated cemented carbide inserts with a binder phase enriched surface zone. More particularly, the present invention relates to coated inserts in which the cubic carbide phase has been optimised in such a way that favourable edge strength and thermal shock resistance can be obtained without, or with only small amounts of, tantalum carbide additions.

[0002] Coated cemented carbide inserts with binder phase enriched surface zone are today used to a great extent for machining of steel and stainless materials. Through the binder phase enriched surface zone an extension of the application area is obtained.

[0003] Methods of producing binder phase enriched surface zones on cemented carbides containing WC, cubic carbide phase and binder phase are known as gradient sintering and have been known for some time, e. g., through Tobioka (US 4,277,283), Nemeth (US 4,610,931) and Yohe (US 4,548,786).

[0004] The patents by Tobioka, Nemeth and Yohe describe methods to accomplish binder phase enrichment by dissolution of the cubic carbide phase close to the insert surfaces. Their methods require that the cubic carbide phase contains some nitrogen, since dissolution of cubic carbide phase at the sintering temperature requires a partial pressure of nitrogen within the body being sintered exceeding the partial pressure of nitrogen within the sintering atmosphere. The nitrogen can be added through the powder and/or the furnace atmosphere during the sintering cycle. The dissolution of cubic carbide phase results in small volumes that will be filled with binder phase giving the desired binder phase enrichment. As a result, a surface zone generally about 25 μm thick consisting of essentially WC and binder phase is obtained. Although the cubic carbide phase is essentially a carbonitride phase, the material is herein referred to as a cemented carbide.

[0005] Cemented carbides with a binder phase enrichment formed by dissolution of the cubic carbide phase usually contain the cubic carbide forming elements tantalum, titanium and niobium. EP-A-263 747 discloses a coated cemented carbide preferably with a cobalt enriched surface layer in which the cemented carbide consists of WC, a hard disperse phase, selected from the group consisting of (Ti,W)CN, (Ti,Nb,W)CN, (Ti,Ta,W)CN and (Ti,Nb,Ta,W)CN and cobalt. It has been disclosed in EP-A-1043416 that a positive effect on the machining properties can be obtained if the amount of niobium is kept below 0.1% by weight. Moreover, EP-A-0560212 and EP-A-0569696 disclose the use of hafnium and zirconium additions. The total as well as the relative amounts of these elements result in slightly different properties of the cemented carbide insert. Tantalum for example is known to inhibit grain growth of the tungsten carbide grains, and to be advantageous to the toughness behaviour of the insert. Niobium has been found to form a more pronounced binder phase depleted zone just beneath the binder enriched surface zone in gradient structured cemented carbides (Frykholm et al, Int. J. of Refractory Metals & Hard Materials, Volume 19 (2001) pp 527-538), which is likely to result in a more brittle behaviour. Tantalum gives a more even distribution of the binder phase in the zone enriched in cubic carbide phase.

[0006] Surprisingly, it has now been found that inserts containing cubic carbides of the elements from the groups IVb and Vb except tantalum show better performance in cutting tests than inserts that contain tantalum.

[0007] Fig 1 shows in 1000X the microstructure of a binder phase enriched surface zone of an insert according to the invention.

[0008] Fig 2 shows the distribution of cobalt in the surface region of an insert according to the invention.

[0009] According to the present invention there is now provided a cemented carbide with a <75 μm , preferably 10-50 μm , thick binder phase enriched surface zone. This zone is essentially free of cubic carbide phase. Below this binder enriched surface zone there is a cubic carbide phase enrichment. The amount of the enrichment depends on the cubic carbide forming elements. The binder phase content of the binder phase enriched surface zone has a maximum in the inner part of 1.2-3 times the nominal binder phase content.

[0010] The present invention is applicable to cemented carbides with varying amounts of binder phase and cubic carbide phase. The binder phase preferably contains cobalt and dissolved carbide forming elements such as tungsten, titanium and niobium. However, there is no reason to believe that neither an intentional or unintentional addition of nickel or iron should influence the result appreciably, nor will small additions of metals that can form intermetallic phases with the binder phase or any other form of dispersions influence the result appreciably.

[0011] The coated cutting tool insert consists of a cemented carbide substrate and a coating, where the substrate comprises WC, binder phase and cubic carbide phase with a binder phase enriched surface zone essentially free of cubic carbide phase.

[0012] The substrate comprises 73-93% by weight WC, 4-12, preferably 5-9, most preferably 5-8% by weight cobalt, balance cubic carbides of the elements from the groups IVb and Vb containing more than 0.3% by weight titanium and more than 0.5% by weight niobium, with a tantalum content on a level corresponding to a technical impurity, that is less than 0.3% by weight, preferably less than 0.1% by weight.

[0013] The content of tungsten in the binder phase may be expressed as the S-value = $\sigma / 16.1$, where σ is the measured magnetic moment of the binder phase in $\mu\text{Tm}^3\text{kg}^{-1}$. The S-value depends on the content of tungsten in the

binder phase and increases with a decreasing tungsten content. Thus, for pure cobalt, or a binder that is saturated with carbon, $S=1$ and for a binder phase that contains tungsten in an amount that corresponds to the borderline to formation of η -phase, $S=0.78$.

[0014] It has now been found according to the present invention that improved cutting performance is achieved if the cemented carbide body has an S-value within the range 0.86-0.96, preferably 0.89-0.93.

[0015] Furthermore the mean intercept length of the tungsten carbide phase measured on a ground and polished representative cross section is in the range 0.5-0.9 μm . The mean intercept length of the cubic carbide phase is essentially the same as for tungsten carbide. The intercept length is measured by means of image analysis on micrographs with a magnification of 10000X and calculated as the average mean value of approximately 1000 intercept lengths.

[0016] In a first preferred embodiment the amount of cubic carbide corresponds to 3-12% by weight of the cubic carbide forming elements titanium and niobium, preferably 4-8% by weight. The titanium content is between 0.5 and 5% by weight, preferably between 1 and 4% by weight.

[0017] The niobium content is between 1 and 10% by weight, preferably between 2 and 6% by weight.

[0018] In a second embodiment up to 60% by weight of niobium is replaced by zirconium, preferably 25-50% by weight.

[0019] In a third embodiment the amount of cubic carbide corresponds to 4-15% by weight of the cubic carbide forming elements titanium, niobium and hafnium, preferably 6-10% by weight.

[0020] The titanium content is between 0.5 and 5% by weight, preferably between 1 and 4% by weight. The niobium content is between 0.5 and 6% by weight, preferably between 1 and 4% by weight. The hafnium content is between 1 and 9% by weight, preferably between 1 and 6% by weight.

[0021] The amount of nitrogen, added either through the powder or through the sintering process or a combination thereof, determines the rate of dissolution of the cubic carbide phase during sintering. The optimum amount of nitrogen depends on the amount and type of cubic carbide phase and can vary between 0.1 and 8% by weight per % by weight of titanium, niobium, zirconium and hafnium.

[0022] Production of cemented carbides according to the invention is done in either of two ways or a combination thereof: (i) by sintering a presintered or compacted body containing a nitride or a carbonitride in an inert atmosphere or in vacuum as disclosed in US 4,610,931, or (ii) by nitriding the compacted body as disclosed in US 4,548,786 followed by sintering in an inert atmosphere or in vacuum.

[0023] Cemented carbide inserts according to the invention are preferably coated with in itself known thin wear resistant coatings with CVD-, MTCVD- or PVD-technique or a combination of CVD and MTCVD. Preferably there is deposited an innermost coating of carbide, nitride and/or carbonitride preferably of titanium. Subsequent layers consist of carbides, nitrides and/or carbonitrides preferably of titanium, zirconium and/or hafnium, and/or oxides of aluminium and/or zirconium.

Example 1

[0024] Turning inserts CNMG120408 and milling inserts SEKN1203AFTN were made by conventional milling of a powder mixture consisting of $(\text{Ti},\text{W})\text{C}$, $\text{Ti}(\text{C},\text{N})$, NbC , WC and Co with a composition of 2.0 wt% Ti, 3.8 wt% Nb, 5.9 wt% Co, 6.20 wt% C, balance W, pressing and sintering. The inserts were sintered in H_2 up to 400°C for dewaxing and further in vacuum to 1260°C. From 1260°C to 1350°C the inserts were nitrided in an atmosphere of N_2 and after that in a protective atmosphere of Ar for 1h at 1460°C.

[0025] The surface zone of the inserts consisted of a 20 μm thick binder phase enriched part essentially free of cubic carbide phase. The maximum cobalt content in this part was about 12 wt%. The S-value of the inserts was 0.90 and the mean intercept length of the tungsten carbide phase 0.7 μm . The CNMG120408 inserts were coated according to known CVD-technique with a coating consisting of 6 μm $\text{Ti}(\text{C},\text{N})$, 8 μm Al_2O_3 and 3 μm TiN . The SEKN1203AFTN inserts were coated according to known CVD-technique with a coating consisting of 4 μm $\text{Ti}(\text{C},\text{N})$ and 3 μm Al_2O_3 .

Example 2

[0026] Example 1 was repeated but with the 3.8 wt% Nb replaced by 2.0 wt% Nb and 3.2 wt% Hf. The powder contained 6.10 wt% C.

[0027] The surface zone of the inserts consisted of a 20 μm thick binder phase enriched part essentially free of cubic carbide phase. The maximum cobalt content in this part was about 12 wt%. The S-value was 0.91 and the mean intercept length of the tungsten carbide phase 0.7 μm . The inserts were coated according to Example 1.

[0028] Example 3 Comparative example

[0029] Example 1 was repeated but with the 3.8 wt% Nb replaced by 2.0 wt% Nb and 3.4 wt% Ta. The powder contained 6.09 wt% C.

[0030] The surface zone of the inserts consisted of a 20 μm thick binder phase enriched part essentially free of cubic

EP 1 314 790 A2

carbide phase. The maximum cobalt content in this part was about 12 wt%. The S-value of the inserts was 0.90 and the mean intercept length of the tungsten carbide phase 0.7 μm . The inserts were coated according to Example 1.

Example 4

[0031] Turning inserts CNMG120408 and milling inserts SEKN1203AFTN were made by conventional milling of a powder mixture consisting of (Ti,W)C, Ti(C,N), NbC, ZrC, WC and

[0032] Co with a composition of 2.0 wt% Ti, 2.1 wt% Nb, 1.6 wt% Zr, 6.3 wt% Co, 6.15 wt% C, balance W, pressing and sintering. The inserts were sintered in H_2 up to 400°C for dewaxing and further in vacuum to 1260°C. From 1260°C to 1350°C the inserts were nitrided in an atmosphere of N_2 and after that in a protective atmosphere of Ar for 1h at 1460°C.

[0033] The surface zone of the inserts consisted of a 20 μm thick binder phase enriched part essentially free of cubic carbide phase. The maximum cobalt content in this part was about 12 wt%. The S-value of the inserts was 0.86 and the mean intercept length of the cubic carbide phase 0.85 μm . The CNMG120408 inserts were coated according to known CVD-technique with a coating consisting of 8 μm Ti(C,N), 2 μm Al_2O_3 and 1 μm TiN. The SEKN1203AFTN inserts were coated according to known CVD-technique with a coating consisting of 4 μm Ti(C,N) and 3 μm Al_2O_3 .

[0034] Example 5 Comparative example

[0035] Example 4 was repeated but with the Zr replaced by 3.4 wt% Ta. The powder contained 6.07 wt% C.

[0036] The surface zone of the inserts consisted of a 20 μm thick binder phase enriched part essentially free of cubic carbide phase. The maximum cobalt content in this part was about 12 wt%. The S-value was 0.87 and the mean intercept length of the cubic carbide phase 0.8 μm . The inserts were coated according to Example 4.

Example 6

[0037] With the CNMG120408 inserts of examples 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 a test consisting of an intermittent turning operation in a steel workpiece of SS1672 was performed with the following cutting data:

Speed: 140 m/min (Example 1, 2 and 3)

Speed: 80 m/min (Example 4 and 5)

Feed: 0.1-0.8 mm/rev

Cutting depth: 2 mm

[0038] 10 edges of each variant were tested with increasing feed up to 0.8 mm/rev. The number of undamaged edges for each feed is shown in the table below.

Feed (mm/rev)	Example 1 (invention)	Example 2 (invention)	Example 3 (comparative)	Example 4 (invention)	Example 5 (comparative)
0.10	10	10	10	10	10
0.14	10	10	9	10	9
0.16	10	10	8	9	9
0.20	9	9	6	8	7
0.25	8	7	3	6	5
0.32	8	7	3	6	4
0.40	7	7	3	6	4
0.50	7	6	3	6	3
0.63	3	2	0	4	1
0.80	1	0	0	1	0

Example 7

[0039] The SEKN1203AFTN inserts from examples 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were tested in a face milling operation with coolant in a steel workpiece of SS2541. The following cutting data were used:

Cutter diameter: 125 mm
 Speed: 250 m/min
 Feed per tooth: 0.2 mm
 Depth of cut: 2.5 mm
 Width of cut: 26 mm
 Length of cut: 600, 1200, 1500 and 1800 mm

[0040] The operation lead to comb cracking of the cutting edge of the insert. The maximum comb crack length (mm) on the flank face was measured for five edges of each of the Examples 1-5, with the following results:

Length of cut (mm)	Example 1 (invention)	Example 2 (invention)	Example 3 (comparative)	Example 4 (invention)	Example 5 (comparative)
600	0.10	0.11	0.15	0.12	0.18
1200	0.18	0.23	0.28	0.22	0.26
1500	0.18	0.21	0.28	0.23	edge failure
1800	0.22	0.23	edge failure	0.25	edge failure

[0041] From Examples 6 and 7 it is apparent that inserts according to the invention, Examples 1, 2 and 4, exhibit a better edge toughness than inserts according to the comparative examples. In addition, inserts according to the invention in Examples 1, 2 and 4 show better resistance to mechanical impact and thermal shock than inserts according to the comparative examples. In particular, inserts according to Example 1 exhibit the most favourable properties of the three Examples (1, 2 and 4) according to the invention. It is evident that the invention leads to improved edge strength as well as improved mechanical impact and thermal shock properties of the cutting tool.

Claims

- Coated cutting tool insert consisting of a cemented carbide substrate and a coating, said substrate comprising WC, binder phase and cubic carbide phase with a binder phase enriched surface zone essentially free of cubic carbide phase, **characterised in that** the substrate comprises 73-93% by weight WC, 4-12% by weight cobalt, balance cubic carbides of the elements from the groups IVb and Vb containing more than 0.3% by weight titanium and more than 0.5% by weight niobium, with the tantalum content on a level corresponding to a technical impurity, that is less than 0.3% by weight, preferably less than 0.1% by weight.
- Coated cutting tool insert according to the preceding claim **characterised in that** the substrate comprises 3-12% by weight, preferably 4-8% by weight, cubic carbide forming elements titanium and niobium.
- Coated cutting tool insert according to the preceding claim **characterised in that** the titanium content of the substrate is between 0.5 and 5% by weight, preferably between 1 and 4% by weight, and the niobium content is between 1 and 10% by weight, preferably between 2 and 6% by weight.
- Coated cutting tool insert according to the preceding claim **characterised in that** up to 60% by weight, preferably 25-50% by weight, of the niobium content of the substrate is replaced by zirconium.
- Coated cutting tool insert according to claim 1 **characterised in that** the substrate comprises 4-15% by weight, preferably 6-10% by weight, cubic carbide forming elements titanium, niobium, and hafnium.
- Coated cutting tool insert according to claim 5 **characterised in that** the titanium content of the substrate is between 0.5 and 4% by weight, the niobium content is between 0.5 and 6% by weight, preferably between 1 and 4% by weight, and the hafnium content is between 1 and 9% by weight, preferably between 1 and 6% by weight.
- Coated cutting tool insert according to any of the preceding claims **characterised in that** the S-value of the substrate is within the range 0.86-0.96, preferably 0.89-0.93.
- Coated cutting tool insert according to any of the preceding claims **characterised in that** the mean intercept length

EP 1 314 790 A2

of the WC phase in the substrate is between 0.5 and 0.9 μm .

9. Coated cutting tool according to any of the preceding claims **characterised in that** the depth of the binder phase enriched surface zone is less than 75 μm , preferably between 10 and 50 μm , and that the binder phase content of the binder phase enriched surface zone has a maximum of 1.2-3 times the nominal binder phase content.

10

15

20

25

30

35

40

45

50

55

Figure 1.

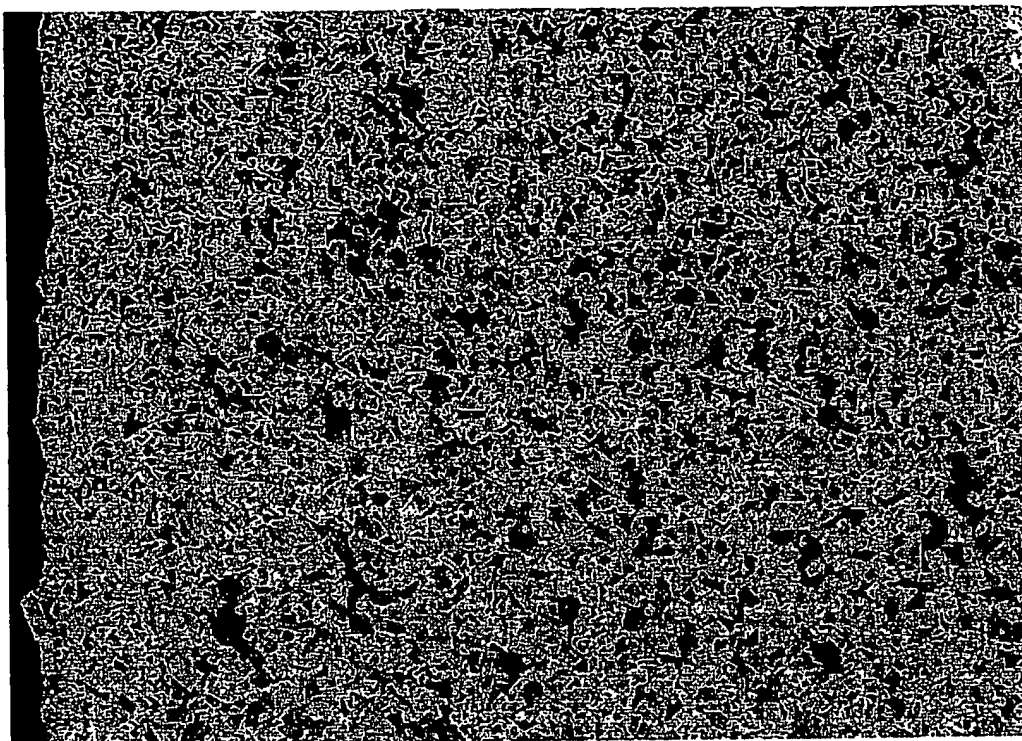


Figure 2.

